

ABA Accreditation of Graduate Programs of Study

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ABA now offers accreditation for graduate programs of study in behavior analysis. Minimum standards include curriculum topics in (a) the principles of behavior, (b) within-subject research methodology and direct observation of behavior, (c) conceptual issues, and (d) behavioral interventions, as well as a thesis, dissertation, review paper, or general examination that is based on a behavior-analytic approach to problems or issues. Accreditation is viewed as one part of a process concerned with demonstrating that a person trained according to a given set of standards is more effective in utilizing the techniques of a science than a person who is not so trained.

Key words: accreditation, ABA

The Association for Behavior Analysis (ABA) now offers accreditation for graduate programs of study in behavior analysis. The purpose of the present article is to inform ABA members of the background of the accreditation process and the rationale for beginning accreditation in these professionally interesting times.

BACKGROUND

Hopkins (1991) recently summarized the work and recommendations of ABA's Task Force on Accreditation and described the actions of the ABA Executive Council in adopting those recommendations. The members of the task force were Jon S. Bailey of Florida State University; Karen Blase of Hull Community Services; Don Bushell, Jr., of the University of Kansas; Anthony J. Cuvo of Southern Illinois University; R. Wayne Fuqua of Western Michigan University; William L. Heward of Ohio State University; B. L. Hopkins and James M. Johnston of Auburn University; Kennon A. Lattal of West Virginia University; Charles L. Salzberg of Utah State University; and Laura Schreibman of the University of California-San Diego.

The task force identified accreditation as a designation that a program of studies meets certain standards. Certification, in contrast, was identified as a designation bestowed on a person who has met certain standards of training or preparation. Licensure was identified as a legal entitlement often bestowed by states on individuals. This entitlement allows a person to engage in some business or occupation (e.g., psychology). The task force limited its considerations to accreditation.

After much debate, a consensus developed among the members of the task force that, although there were obvious risks, a well-executed accreditation system might contribute to the effectiveness of our graduate training by (a) causing us to be public and explicit about how we train, (b) occasioning systematic and regular review of our training efforts, and (c) creating a forum for sharing training methods. Benefits of accreditation include increased effectiveness of training, greater employment of its graduates, and increased leverage with state legislatures regarding funding. The members of the task force generally agreed that standards for accreditation should initially be simple, flexible, and few in number. They also agreed that the costs of accreditation should be modest. There was a particularly strong consensus that accreditation should not only protect the interests of

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behavior analysts but should also serve students and clients of behavioral services.

After further discussion, the members of the task force agreed that they would recommend accreditation of graduate *programs of study*. A program of study need not have any official political or structural status in a college or university. A program of study might be nested in such a university division or it might even involve the faculty from two or more such divisions. The intent in emphasizing a program of study, rather than some political or administrative division of a university, was to provide a way for interested behavior analysts to promote accreditation independently of local structure. The important dimension would be the nature of the training that the students received, rather than the existence of a formal academic unit.

In addition, the task force adopted the position that accreditation was concerned with programs of study in any aspect of behavior analysis, from applied work to basic research to conceptual development to various combinations of these. Again, the emphasis was on the nature of the training received, rather than on the labeling of the program. Thus, a program of study could be appropriate to the local setting and would not have to be an entire graduate program devoted to the experimental analysis of behavior, applied behavior analysis, clinical psychology, or teacher education.

Pursuant to a suggestion from the ABA Executive Council, the task force developed a set of minimum standards for accreditation of programs at both the master's and the doctoral levels. The minimum standards at the master's level consist of an educational program with instruction in behavior-analytic approaches to research and conceptual issues that includes curriculum topics in (a) the principles of behavior; (b) within-subject research methodology and direct observation of behavior; (c) conceptual issues; and (d) behavioral interventions with such possible emphases as behavior therapy, behavioral teaching, and behavioral medicine. The standards further

specify a thesis, review paper, or general examination whose questions and methods are based on a behavior-analytic approach to problems or issues. The term *curriculum topic* was used rather than *course* to emphasize the importance of the nature of the educational experience, rather than the often arbitrary distribution of activities over time.

The minimum standards at the doctoral level are a continuation or an extension of those of the master's level. Thus, standards at the doctoral level assume that students have already satisfied those of the master's level. The doctoral-level standards consist of an educational program with instruction in behavior-analytic approaches to research and conceptual issues that includes advanced curriculum topics in (a) one or more specialized areas of the nonhuman and/or human basic research literature, (b) research methods, and (c) one or more areas of the applied behavioral literature. The standards for a doctoral program of study further specify a dissertation whose questions and methods are based on a behavior-analytic approach to problems and issues.

The task force noted options available to the program being reviewed. It also recommended procedures for modifying the standards, appointing members to the ABA Accrediting Board, and the board's receiving and reviewing applications for accreditation. The ABA Executive Council adopted these recommendations in 1991. It is especially important to note that the board will only make recommendations about accreditation to the Executive Council. All action is taken by the council. Jay Moore of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee was appointed to be the first Chair of the Accreditation Board. Initial members of the board are Mark Galizio of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Gina Green of the E. K. Shriver Center, Kennon A. Lattal of West Virginia University, Margaret E. Lloyd of Central Washington University, Charles L. Salzberg of Utah State University, and C. Richard Tsegaye-Spates of Western Michigan University. The board has now received its first re-

quests for consideration for accreditation; processes like those recommended by the task force are beginning to occur.

ACCREDITATION: WHY, AND WHY NOW?

ABA is beginning to accredit programs of study at an interesting and possibly even a dangerous time in the history of the profession. Some reflections on recent events will highlight some of the complexities inherent in accreditation, especially for applied programs.

As many members of ABA may know, thousands of academic, research-oriented psychologists have recently deserted the 100-year-old American Psychological Association (APA) because the governance of APA has been taken over by practicing psychologists, a majority of whom are clinical psychologists. The *Division 25 Recorder* has published some of the debate on the recent trials of APA (Catania, 1991; Graham, 1991; Hayes, 1991; Paniagua, 1991; Salzinger, 1991; Stolz, 1991). A significant portion of the debate concerns the relatively large amount of attention that APA devotes to "guild" issues, such as third-party payments and fee structures for various kinds of applied psychologists, rather than to scientific research issues associated with the scholarly traditions of a learned society.

Of course, APA is the major force in accrediting applied and professional programs in psychology. Its domination of the accreditation process contributes to the current tension in the discipline (Brewer, 1992). The complaints about APA accreditation are legion. Some assert that it is inappropriate for an organization (APA) that is controlled by practicing psychologists to dictate standards by which programs housed in universities are accredited. Others assert that APA standards for accreditation are irrelevant to the broader context of applied psychology. Still others assert that APA accreditation seems to include a great deal of concern about process and adherence to criteria, but little concern about outcome.

Given these controversies about APA and its accreditation process, a number of questions arise concerning ABA and its efforts at accreditation. Some are broad. For example, if accreditation is such a good idea, then why is it so controversial in APA? Similarly, should ABA even contemplate accreditation?

Others are more focused: Are the standards adopted by ABA equally relevant to the training of both practitioners and researchers? After all, APA accredits only applied programs. ABA will accredit programs emphasizing applied work, basic research, conceptual analyses, and mixtures of all three.

Still other questions suggest that ABA might eventually face the same problems currently confronting APA. For example, if a majority of the members of ABA will someday be practitioners, as appears likely, will they try to dictate to those in academic behavior analysis how programs of education and training "should" be run? After all, don't members of ABA already debate how graduate students should be trained for applied work (Baer, 1992; Johnston, 1992; Malott, 1992; Reid, 1992)? Will ABA be fragmented like APA over these issues?

Perhaps these questions can be usefully placed in a broader context. As a case in point, let us consider the issues associated with accrediting applied programs. If a scientific discipline has a good theory about the way some manipulable part of the universe works, then techniques for changing that part of the universe are likely to result. If applications of the technology are at all complex, then some people are likely to specialize in these applications. If other people value changes in those parts of the universe, then they are likely to pay the specialists for applying the useful technology. Thus are created practitioners or people who apply technology derived from science.

In any case, once a science has yielded technologies of sufficient complexity that specialists are required to apply them, some regulation of the training of those specialists is common. The intent of the regulation is to ensure the technology-related skill of practitioners. Such regu-

lation occurs in medicine and engineering. The regulation in these areas may be far from perfect, but educators commonly assume that applications of the relevant technology are better with regulation than without it.

Behavior analysis seems to be in this same position. Behavior analysis describes how the behavioral part of the universe works. Behavior-analytic technologies have proved useful enough that they are employed in a wide variety of situations, ranging from the workplace (Fox, Hopkins, & Anger, 1987) to educational settings (Becker & Engelman, 1978; Bushell, 1978). At least for the moment, the applications of these technologies are often sufficiently complex that specialized training is necessary before a person can reliably accomplish the changes in the behavioral part of the universe.

Let us return for the moment to the question of what has gone wrong with APA and its accreditation process. Presumably, the officers of APA did not intend for the organization to become so split. Rather, they intended for APA to oversee the effective application of technology as they see it.

Let us consider the standards involved in APA accreditation. Accreditation by APA is based on standards that include statements about (a) the kinds of institutions that may carry out accredited training, (b) the backgrounds of faculty that should carry out the training, (c) the devotion of the training program to cultural and individual differences, (d) the recruitment and retention of certain kinds of people as trainees, (e) the existence of certain kinds of facilities, and (f) the existence of certain educational experiences and methods. APA standards for clinical psychologists have evolved from common practices in educational institutions. With regard to educational experiences, APA standards require the teaching of courses in such areas as biological bases of behavior, cognitive-affective bases of behavior, social bases of behavior, and individual differences (American Psychological Association Council of Representatives, 1979).

What is wrong with these standards? There is probably nothing "wrong" with them, as far as they go. However, APA standards do not require an accredited program to teach technologies that are based in science and that have been demonstrated to change those parts of the behavioral universe that are problems. They do not require accredited programs to teach students which technologies have and which have not been shown to be effective for relevant problems. They do not require that graduates of accredited programs be successful in applying proven technology. In summary, there are absolutely no data to support the implication that a person trained according to APA standards will be any more effective in applying technologies to the benefit of clients than a person who is not so trained. Rather, APA's accreditation process appears designed to satisfy the diverse extrascientific demands of a heterogeneous constituency. Perhaps there is little wonder that pragmatic, empirically minded academic and practicing psychologists are critical of accreditation as carried out by APA.

CONCLUSION

ABA should be able to do much better. Its goals concerning the accreditation process should presumably include the following:

1. To develop a statement of the kinds of evidence and controls necessary for declaring a behavioral technology effective for a given problem.
2. To sort the existing technologies into those that research has proved effective and those that it has proved ineffective.
3. To require that applied programs seeking accreditation teach which technologies are effective and which are ineffective.
4. To promote research that will analyze and develop training methods for teaching students to employ effective technology.
5. To promote research that will analyze and develop training methods and experiences for teaching students to work effectively.

6. To educate consumers of behavioral technology and employers of behavioral practitioners about which technologies are effective and which are ineffective, and then to promote the use of effective technology.

7. To develop a code of ethics that emphasizes, among other practices, the use of technologies that are effective and eschews those, except for research purposes, that are ineffective.

8. To move as rapidly as possible to revise standards for accreditation to reflect, not simply educational experiences, but training in effective technology that is based on methods defined at least partly by the eventual success of graduates of programs.

As these goals suggest, ABA's accreditation process should serve the discipline by helping to demonstrate that a person trained according to ABA standards is more effective in applying technologies than a person who is not so trained. After all, we must not forget that we are in the same position as APA: We have yet to supply the data that warrant such a statement.

The possibilities appear promising. Perhaps the scholarly contributions of those who clarify basic principles will be more generally recognized. Perhaps the demonstrated usefulness of those who bring the fruits of science to the culture will be more generally appreciated. Perhaps science will be more generally recognized as a source of a better life. Perhaps tightening the relationship between science and its technological value to society will even improve the quality of science. Perhaps a basis for maintaining ABA as the viable, functional organization it has become over the last 20 years will have been established. Perhaps ABA will have initiated a research program for solving arguments about training methods. Perhaps, then, an accreditation process that is appropriate for behavior analysis will have been achieved.

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